

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

On the Home Front: Stress for Recently Deployed Army Couples

Allen, E. S., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2011). On the home front: Stress for recently deployed Army couples. *Family Process, 50*(2), 235-247. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.2011.01357.x

SUMMARY: Couples consisting of an Active Duty Army husband and civilian wife who experienced a deployment in the previous year completed a survey regarding their experiences of stress, family variables, feelings of connection and support, and military experiences. Greater combat exposure, greater family stress, greater need for support, and more negative attitudes toward the Army were associated with higher ratings of deployment-related stress in couples.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Greater combat exposure, greater family stress (mother perceived child psychological problems, sense of economic strain, and lower marital quality), greater need for support, and more negative attitudes regarding the Army and mission were associated with higher ratings of stress regarding the military and deployment-related issues.
- Stress was highest for concerns of combat, death, physical or psychological injury, loneliness, and negative effects on children. Wives reported significantly more stress associated with these issues than their husbands.
- Couples where the husband reported more combat exposure during the last deployment were higher on stress measures.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education to military couples to enhance positive communication skills and how to increase marital satisfaction and reduce marital stress
- Disseminate information to military families about the resources available to them to assist in addressing stress factors
- Offer money management workshops to Service members and their families to reduce the risk of financial strain and money mismanagement

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that help civilian wives manage stress, particularly in the areas marriage, parenting, psychological issues with the family, and financial issues
- Encourage collaboration between DoD and community-based programs that support military families during stressful transitions (e.g., child birth, deployment)
- Recommend education for service providers working with military families regarding the unique stressors associated with military service

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METHODS

- Couples (Active Duty U.S. Army husband and civilian wife) were recruited from a larger study which offered a marriage education workshop in Fort Campbell, KY.
- Inclusion criteria for the study required that couples were married, had one Active Duty member currently stationed at Fort Campbell, and had not previously completed a marriage workshop.
- Data for the current study were drawn from the baseline assessments of the larger study.

PARTICIPANTS

- The average marriage length was 5.3 years (SD = 4.5); 78% of couples had at least one child living in their household at least part time.
- Most wives were White (72%) with an average age of 27.8 (SD = 6.1) years.
- The majority of husbands were White (70%) with an average age of 28.4 (SD = 5.7) years.

LIMITATIONS

- The findings of the study may not generalize to all military couples, as participants were only from the Army, married, heterosexual, Active Duty men with no Active Duty spouse, and couples involved in a study focused on marriage education for military families.
- Data were only collected following deployment, so researchers were unable to determine whether variables were predictors or sequelae of stress.
- Researchers did not collect many potential confounding variables (i.e., mental health issues) that may account for relationships between many of the variables.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct longitudinal research to identify what variables are predictors and what variables pre-dated deployment to help illuminate a clearer understanding of how these variables predict stress
- Utilize a more representative sample, including active duty women, same sex partners, and all branches of the military
- Consider how length of deployment influences stress outcomes in military families

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